

# Council Meeting – 11 December 2018

## Report of Councillor Terry Beale – Housing Services

### 1. Deane Housing Development

There are numerous work streams being undertaken by the Housing Enabling and Development Team. The following is a highlight summary for key areas of ongoing work.

#### **Weavers Arms, Rockwell Green, Wellington**

- 1.1 I am aware of some comments and disquiet with regards to this development and I am delighted to report that 13 homes were handed over from the developer WRW Construction on the 29 November 2018 with the remaining 13 homes being handed over early in 2019.
- 1.2 The team are working closely with the three returning decants and preparing to advertise eight for rent through Homefinder Somerset and launch two for shared ownership.

#### **North Taunton**

- 1.3 The Project is progressing very well.
- 1.4 A fourth Public Consultation event was held on the 5 October 2018 and was well attended by the local residents. The team continue to work closely with the community with invaluable support from the residents' Design Group.
- 1.5 So far we have interacted with over 90% with over one to one visits, opportunities for people to attend the drop in at the Project Office in Rochester Road located in the centre of the community and the four public consultation events that have been held.
- 1.6 Regular newsletters have been distributed and project updates maintained through the Council's website on the dedicated North Taunton Woolaway Regeneration page.
- 1.7 The planning application is imminent. The design was presented to the Design Review Panel on the 15 November 2018 and was very well received. We are waiting on a written report to incorporate recommendations as appropriate into the application. There will be an outline application anticipated to be for up to 280 dwellings and a detailed Phase 1 application for 48 dwellings.
- 1.8 A final Council Report is being prepared and will travel through the following meeting schedule:
  - Tenant Services Management Board – 14 January 2019;
  - Taunton Deane Scrutiny – 15 January 2019;
  - Taunton Deane Executive – 7 February 2019;

- Shadow Executive – 11 February 2019;
- Taunton Deane Full Council –20 March 2019.

## **Oake**

- 1.9 The Pilot project for the Woolaway repair is progressing with a contractor being selected and details of the contract being drawn up.

## **12 Moorland Close, Taunton**

- 1.10 Three flats were handed over in July 2018. The lease is being progressed between the Taunton East Development Trust and Assets to enable the Link Centre to move across. This should be signed off within the next few weeks.

## **Outer Circle, Taunton**

- 1.11 Planning for the scheme was granted in April 2018 and work will begin shortly to progress the development of 4 x 1 bed units where the Link Centre is currently located.

## **Laxton Road, Taunton**

- 1.12 Work has started again to progress the development of eight flats on part of the garage sites. It is anticipated we will go out to tender for a contractor in early 2019.

## **Future Council Development Pipeline**

- 1.13 Work continues to build up the future pipeline to increase Council housing provision. We are currently looking at acquiring three properties which total 38 bed spaces from a private sector landlord. We are also working on a couple of potential land acquisitions for the new build pipeline.

## **Affordable Housing Completions**

- 1.14 Over 200 affordable homes are anticipated to complete in 2018/2019 with affordable housing discussions continuing on numerous planning applications at various stages to maintain a strong pipeline for delivery.

## **General Enabling**

- 1.15 Regrettably we still have a continued increase in viability challenges in relation to affordable housing requirements resulting in lengthy negotiations.

## **Large Scales Sites of interest**

- 1.16 Jurston Farm, Wellington is on site and we anticipate the first of the 50 affordable homes completing in 2020.
- 1.17 Comeytrove and Staplegrove – Section 106 Agreement affordable housing terms are 99% agreed, just waiting on final comments.
- 1.18 Killams, Taunton - Phase 2 on site. Discounted open market homes are selling well. The rented properties will be marketed through a Housing Association for letting through Homefinder.
- 1.19 Nerrols, Taunton – Last tranche of affordable housing is due by 31 March 2019.

## **Others sites of interest**

- 1.20 Cornhill, Wellington – We are working closely with the developer and a Housing Association to bring forward 38 new homes which we anticipate will all be affordable.
- 1.21 It is extremely exciting and gratifying that Housing Associations remain committed to the area and LiveWest have a particularly strong pipeline of new build development. There are potentially over 250 homes under discussion with the Housing Associations for sites they are leading on. There will inevitably be some which drop but it is still a fantastic volume.
- 1.22 I congratulate the team once again for a job well done!

## **2. Deane Housing Repairs and Maintenance**

- 2.1 The recent STAR survey has highlighted that overall leaseholder satisfaction remains very good. However there have been issues highlighted at Langham Gardens, Taunton with regards to overcharging.
- 2.2 Following on from the last meeting at Langham Gardens, the leaseholders have asked for somebody from Property Services to sign off the next tranche of rechargeable routine repairs, making sure the prices are reasonable before giving this information to the Accountant who will prepare the Annual Service Charges.
- 2.3 In addition I have asked officers to prepare a full report on the charges and I will ensure the residents are updated.
- 2.4 I would like to take this opportunity to thank Claire Thackray who has been overseeing the leasehold schemes for some time and is taking up another post within the Council. She has carried out her duties with expertise and a sense of humour. She will be sorely missed and we wish her well for the future. She will maintain some involvement until a decision is taken as to the way forward.

### 3. Welfare Reform

#### Universal Credit (UC)

- 3.1 Managed Migration of Universal Credit was due to take place from July 2019, however, the Government have recently delayed this to early 2020. This means claimants who are still in receipt of Legacy Benefits will be transferred onto Universal Credit.
- 3.2 We have already experienced difficulties with our tenants who are in receipt of Universal Credit making it important that we prepare ourselves as best as we can for the full migration. Preparation is underway to put together literature advising tenants of the best ways to prepare themselves for these changes and the help that is on offer to them.
- 3.3 We have been active in supporting our Council tenants with Discretionary Housing Payments and so far during 2018/2019 financial year we have received £17,250.65 towards topping up continuing Housing Costs and Rent arrears.
- 3.4 We have recently been enrolled onto the Universal Credit Landlord portal which allows us to verify tenants Housing Costs. It also gives us the ability to apply for Alternative Payments Arrangements (APA) and Rent Arrears deductions without having to wait for it to be agreed by Universal Credit staff. They have placed a responsibility on us to ensure we are applying for an APA responsibly as the Government want to empower Universal Credit claimants to manage their own money.
- 3.5 Future Universal Credit changes:-
  - From December 2018, 18-21 year olds will be entitled to claim Housing Costs through Universal Credit. 18-21 year olds were previously restricted from claiming Housing Costs unless they were in a specified group;
  - From 1 February 2019, families with more than two children who make new claims for Universal Credit will no longer be directed to claim Child Tax Credit instead. The two child limit will apply to those families. Families who have been awarded Universal Credit after April 2017 and have two or fewer children but who then have a third or subsequent child will have the two-child limit applied.
  - From April 2019, Work allowances which are the amount of your earnings from employment that you are allowed to keep before it is taken into account as income for Universal Credit will increase. These will increase by £1,000 for the year, meaning that people in work who have children or have limited capability for work (or their partner has limited capability for work) will benefit by up to £630 per year. However if you are a worker who has no children or you or your partner have not been assessed as having limited capability for work, you will still not receive help in the form of work allowances.

- From October 2019, the maximum rate at which deductions can be made from Universal Credit, to repay an advance payment, will be reduced from 40% to 30% of the standard allowance of Universal Credit. The period over which advances can be recovered will be extended from 12 to 16 months, from October 2021.

## 4. Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Service

- 4.1 In the last quarter, the ASB Team has gone through a significant period of change. Andy Smith has got himself established in the team but is planning to move to a management position as part of the Transformation process so is closing cases where appropriate. Jack Madge left the team (and closed many of his cases) and Sue Morrison has taken up his post and is getting herself established.
- 4.2 When cases are closed, the “victim” is informed and sent a feedback survey. Regrettably the return rates for the survey forms is very low. Analysis of those forms returned indicate the percentage of tenants who have reported ASB in the past 12 months rating the advice and support they received as excellent or good is currently 89% (last quarter 91%). An explanation for the slight drop may be the change of officer dealing with their complaint – in the main our customers do not like change because they feel they have to relate the facts and the emotional impact on them to another person.
- 4.3 The percentage of ASB cases closed as “resolved” is 95%. With some cases we simply cannot realistically resolve the case to everyone’s satisfaction but a full explanation (of our limitations) are given to victims.
- 4.4 Cases of note:-
- Reports from eight separate neighbours of ASB in the Taunton area. On 21 September 2018, warrant of possession granted by the County Court and perpetrator has been evicted.
  - Domestic abuse. ASB Team and Sheltered Housing Officer dealt with the most sensitive and complicated report of domestic abuse involving a very elderly victim. A Non Molestation Order was obtained and an abusive partner removed from the Council’s property.
  - Report from neighbour about ASB in house occupied by a young single mother. The ASB Team worked with Social Services and child placed in care. Support put in for single mother involving Leaving Care, Somerset Drugs and Alcohol service, Police and education authority. The single mother signed an Acceptable Behaviour Contract with Housing and has now enrolled on a University Course. No reports of ASB for six weeks.
  - On-going work in Duke Street flats, Taunton to combat drug abuse and reports of “cuckooing”/ County lines drug misuse.

As Christmas approaches, I would like to say a tremendous thank you to all my colleagues and especially the officers. They work tirelessly, often under extreme stress, and frankly the pressure they are put under is often unnecessary. It is due to their dedication and professionalism that this Council is doing well and will thrive in the future.

Councillor Terry Beale